Idyllic Pastoral: Environmental Scenic Remedial Sublimes for Apocalyptic Eco-phobia in Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood

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Abstract
This paper explores idyllic pastoral as a remedy of apocalyptic eco-phobia in Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood. It looks into eco-phobia as intimidating fear felt by the characters when they undergo imminent apocalyptic experience. It unravels the contiguous affinity between eco-phobia and the environment which is blatantly projected in the novel for the sake of highlighting its negative effect on the characters who suffer from terrifying eco-phobic feelings. The study sheds light on pastoral as ideal environmental scenery providing the characters with possible outlets to escape destructive apocalyptic events caused by their feelings of eco-phobia. Pastoral, therefore, will be discussed via applying Greg Garrard’s concept of pastoral that includes scenic sublimes, like solitary landscapes, wilderness, forests, lakes, mountains and cliffs that embody ideal alternatives for the threatened environmental places. Accordingly, the study attempts to demonstrate how the fictional characters’ resort to these scenic sublimes to seek peace and solace of mind by living satisfactorily in their natural milieus. Such scenic sublimes will be discovered as ultimate condition leading the characters to recognize the vital function of nature to their life. Consequently, scenic sublimes make them strongly conscious of nature’s crucial significance to their lives. In the long run, they become able to preserve environment for avoiding any calamitous destruction. In this respect, the concept of apocalypse will be polarized in terms of its complications. The study’s gap lies in exploring pastoral as a decisive remedy for echo-phobia.

Introduction
Literature and environment are integral subjects of eco-criticism. Scholars tend to interpret literary texts according to the depiction of environmental nature and its related concerns. In this sense, nature is examined in the context of literary topics which are deduced by specialized researchers. The necessity of tackling nature from a literary perspective serves as a way of responding to natural crises or problems and the possibility of resolving via viable ventures. For this reason, eco-critics seriously accentuate literary themes, purposes and techniques as mere exemplification of natural description of the environment’s situation and how it could be properly preserved. On that account, literary writers evoke environmental physical and non-physical perfection. They conjure up effective perception of the environment; whereby “in the non-physical aspect, the imagination is tied to writers’ cultural, spiritual, connection to place” (Egya, 2020). Being so, literary imagination plays an influential role in revealing the environmental intricate negative issues and the way they could be mitigated through deliberate and elaborate literary works. Accordingly, literature and the natural environment are profoundly highlighted in eco-critical matters. The significance of literature to nature lies in exposing the inherent crises threatening the ideal situation of the environment. One of these crises is eco-phobia. In recent decades, there has been much obsession with the natural imminent danger which could lead to an equal threat to the lives of human beings. Literature approaches eco-phobia to a great extent. It is concerned with reflecting humanity’s feeling of natural dangers. Eco-phobia, in literary contexts, indicates diverse human experience amid fierce environmental precarious changes. Here, literature envisions the complication of natural problems that make people more afraid of their surrounding environment. Literary descriptions have a serious predilection to depict such human feelings as a logical response to the vitality of safe environmental recovery “representations of rest and recovery in literature in light of changing attitudes towards humanity’s relation to land itself” (Kalaidjian, 2020). In this way, eco-phobia designates the sense of exhausted environment portrayed in literary works. Literary authors, therefore, attempt to describe this environmental exhaustion through serious narrative modes regarding the state of nature.

For this reason, this research will focus on the literary attempts to deal with the issue of eco-phobia and its dangerous consequences in human life. More specifically, it will examine the issue of eco-phobia in Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood. The research will apply three eco-critical concepts to interpret eco-phobia portrayed in these novels. The concepts will be Garrard’s pastoral and the concept of apocalypse. The concept of pastoral will be applied to discuss the pastoral scenes celebrated in the novel. The concept of apocalypse, on the other hand, will unravel the novel’s indirect warning of the death of nature and, consequently, the death of human beings. The concept of pastoral will reveal how Atwood uses her fictional settings and scenic sublimes as a tool of spreading consciousness in order to avoid the destruction of nature.
These scenes exemplify Atwood’s predilection for serene and safe environment.

**Literature Review**

(Morrell, 2012), in The Dialectic of Climate Change: Apocalypse, Utopia and the Environmental Imagination, argues that Atwood’s The Year of the Flood offers a consideration of the place of science fiction within climate change discourse and a meditation on the significance of climate change within literary discourse. The popular distinction between science fact and science fiction oversimplifies both concepts, re-casting them as synonyms for truth and falsity projected in the novel. The desire for this distinction results from overt realism with regard to the characters and purpose of the scientific method, and it produces a narrowing of the imaginative and descriptive possibilities of the novel’s fictional qualities.

The science of climate natural change is, in large part, a narrative endeavor, and it is the shape of the novel’s narrative that is being contested in arguments on the issues climate constant change rhetoric; and how Atwood succeeds in framing global natural dilemmas themes because “The Year of the Flood builds upon the story of Oryx and Crake, offering a more thorough set of critical perspectives on capitalism and collapse” (p.70). In his study, (Morrell, 2012) connects the novel with its sequel, Oryx and Crake, in the trilogy to explore the purpose of science fiction as a capital and economic concern that might destroy nature. To clarify, (Morrell, 2012) discusses human scientific methods to harness nature for economic propery, which inherently results in environmental collapse. The study ostensibly does not scrutinize the literary tenets of the novel. Contrary to (Morrell, 2012) analysis, this research will allow much interest in eco-phobia instead of dystopia. It is going to interpret the literary insights of eco-phobia inserted by Atwood’s literary expertise to belittle the human harmful effect on the natural environment. In this regard, eco-phobia will be discovered as the inciting notion that leads to the exploration of natural destruction. (Labudová, 2010) also deals with themes of pain, power, and manipulation in the novel. These themes are connected with the theological nuances of the novel. That is, there are several narrative allusions to the creation of the world in the novel which necessitates the importance of protecting nature against any destructive activity. The characters, such as Glenn and Crake are representations of people who help and love the Gardeners. These Gardeners exemplify the divine supreme will to create a perfect environment for humanity. On that account, (Labudová, 2010) writes: “how much the ideas and beliefs of the Gardeners parallel Glenn’s own concepts. It seems that Crake used to be affected (and, possibly, manipulated) by their ideas. First, Glenn was acting as a friend of the Gardeners, helping them to smuggle biopsy samples; later, he manipulated them into working on his Paradise Project (p.143).

(Labudová, 2010) study offers a coherent textual discussion of the divine will to create a perfect environment reflected in the narrative demarcation of the novel. This narrative token about the divine ideal creation strengthens the fictional characters’ ambition to be in safe natural environment. However, once this environment is neglected, the divine might radically change and destroy nature. Therefore, (Labudová, 2010) explication of the characters’ manipulated power imputed environmental perfection to divine will. (Labudová, 2010) appropriates dystopia in the light of mere natural components. Yet, the study does not offer enough textual clues regarding the authentic reasons and causes of environmental deterioration. In this way, the entire study does not rely on proper eco-critical synthesis of the reality of natural dystopia depicted in the novel. In contrast, it only unravels dystopia in terms of Atwood’s discontent with the current status of the environment. In laconic words, my study will be specifically on the notion of eco-awareness the plays an influential role in reinforcing people’s natural consciousness concerning the environment. Such level of consciousness, or awareness, is not found in (Labudová, 2010) perception of nature in Atwood’s narrative descriptions of dystopia in the course of The Year of the Flood.

**Analysis and Discussion**

**Eco-Phobia**

Eco-phobia entails the human practices against nature depicted in literary works. To clarify, it includes people’s perception of the ecological significance to their lives. In this way, they should develop collective effort to perverse nature from any disastrous retardation. In this regard, (Aykanat et al., 2020) argues that harnessing nature for the benefit of people is not a kind of eco-
phobia. It does not also entail the process of using nature for the ultimate expediency of human utilization. However, eco-phobia is very essential to “prioritize environmental issues and ecological cycles on the one hand and, on the other, encourage control of nature” (p.223). In this case, eco-phobia motivates people to look more deeply into the importance of nature surrounding them. Consequently, the fictional characters’ fearful feelings caused by environmental problems would lead them to be more serious in tackling nature in a suitable manner. Nevertheless, the unjustified over-utilization of nature is the core of eco-phobia since it leads to the inevitable destruction of nature around them. Here, (Aykanat et al., 2020) does not agree with this utilization. Instead, he implicitly warns against the threat of nature through these excessive practices portrayed in literature. Moreover, the environmental materials are like the fictional “insects, fish, marine reptiles, and birds” (p.243) that are necessary for the continuity of natural vitality and production. Atwood’s The Year of the Flood depicts these fictional materials in the course of the plot. The novel parades several birds and other creatures that are necessary for the human lives. Vultures, for example, are highly attended by the Gardeners who see in them a divide view of nature. Accordingly, preserving them entails persevering humanity as a whole. The Gardeners, in this respect, consider them as their friends because they are integral components of humanity’s environmental living conditions. They also teach people that vulture and other birds are important of life. This effort emanates from their frightful feeling of eco-phobia that might harm nature and its elements. They put the importance of natural materials, like birds, on the first rug of their educational project concerning the environment. This is because these materials keep the earth clean and healthy. Nonetheless, life would be terrible and not suitable for living: “vultures are our friends, the Gardeners used to teach. They purify the earth. They are God’s necessary dark Angels of bodily dissolution. Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!” (p.1). such terrible imagination of over-exploitation of the environmental elements lies in the essence of eco-phobia.

Being fictional characters, the Gardeners negatively feel the sense of eco-phobia through possible dangerous events. Therefore, they strenuously try to keep nature safe via preserving its material elements. The novel, additionally, accentuates the spatial setting of the environment. Atwood offers precise narrative clues about the deteriorated position of nature and how it is inhabited by characters that do sense its imminent destruction. In the first place, she uses the Gardeners as fictional people dealing with the peril of nature as they develop a severe feeling of eco-phobia. Moreover, she portrays nature as a “playground” for such feelings as the main characters undergo this experience. The setting, consequently, plays an influential role in identifying the authorial depiction of eco-phobia in the characters’ lives. Here, I tend to focus on nature and its “fabric” created by Atwood’s omniscient narrative point of view used in the plot. Environmental nature is the central concentration of the novel’s treatment of eco-phobia felt by the Gardeners: “the Gardeners were skimpy on toys — Nature is our playground — and the only toys they approved of were sewed out of leftover fabric or knitted with saved-up string, or they’d be wrinkly old-person figures with heads fashioned from dried crabapples” (p.44). Being so, Atwood’s primal obsession with nature springs from depicting nature as a “playground” in which the Gardeners experience eco-phobia and how it could be halted. Such obsession is projected in the course of the events; and it reinforces the characters, especially the Gardeners to follow strict and curative agendas for preserving nature before and calamitous incidents. As a result, the utilization of the Gardeners’ response to nature is an authentic manifestation of eco-phobia that must be overcome.

Eco-phobia, furthermore, involves the sense of the combat between the fictional characters and the environment (Thomashow, 2020). This is due to the fact that the characters feel the forthcoming threat of nature; and they develop fearful reaction towards it. Such reaction is the essence of eco-phobia. Consequently, (Moriarty, 2020) connects the fictional characters’ eco-phobia when they recognize their excessive exploitation of the environment. Furthermore, she argues that the characters’ feeling of environmental deterioration is initiated by “combative relationships” between the fictional “protagonists” and the depicted “landscapes”; whereby this literary conflict is “positioned as an epic battle between man … and nature” (p.40). Accordingly, the fictional characters become eco-phobic when they pay attention to their over-utilization of the environmental nature around them. The results, therefore, would be massive i.e., the characters might lose the opportunity of their survival since the “the environment which is most uncertain and which most threatens their ability to survive” (p.40), (Moriarty, 2020), here, ascribes the eco-phobia to the characters’ perception of environmental danger engulfing their life. Being so, they must be alert to the negative consequences of destroying nature.
Atwood, in *The Year of the Flood*, fictionalizes this alert position through the characters’ insistence on the importance of being “vigil” and cautious of any environmental aftermath. Adam One, for example, instructs the other characters to follow their guidelines concerning preserving the gardens. At the same time, he describes the characters’ “fears” of wasting nature as a great divine gift: “Just ask for guidance,” said Adam One. ‘Do an overnight Vigil. Pray for the strength to face your doubts and fears. I feel confident that a positive answer will be provided to you. You have gifts that should not be wasted. We would all welcome you as an Eve among us, I can assure you” (p.105). In this case, Adam One incarnates Atwood’s obsession with accentuating her fictional characters’ feeling of losing nature which is perfectly create by God. Therefore, they must keep their nature safe. Otherwise, they will not be blessed with its perfection and significance to people. Pilar, who is another character, complies with Adam One’s instructions. He abides by the rules and conditions that might alleviate them from their eco-phobic feelings created by their destructive utilization of the environmental nature. As a response, he holds the responsibility of being the “keeper” of the natural environment. Atwood’s omniscient narrator conveys this responsibility as follows: “Pilar was the keeper of the Vigil materials and the other Gardener out of-body voyaging substances. Toby hadn’t spoken with her for several days because of her illness — a stomach virus, it was said. But in their conversation Adam One hadn’t mentioned anything about this illness, so maybe Pilar was well again. Those bugs never lasted more than a week” (p.105). In this sense, Pilar could protect the environmental elements in his duty as a keeper of the garden. In doing so, he mitigates the fearful feelings of environmental threats. Such threats resulted in fatal diseases that cause some characters, like Pilar, illness. Hence, eco-phobia is portrayed as a response to alleviate the characters from deadly environmental danger.

Environmental danger, accordingly, lies at the essence of natural propels. (Guignard & Murphy, 2020), in *Literature, Writing, and the Natural World*, claim that eco-phobia is a kind of direct exposure to the environment. In other words, the fictional characters interact with nature directly by exerting destructive practices against nature without regard to the possible sequences of their exploitation of nature. (Guignard & Murphy, 2020) tend to describe the fictional characters as “individuals” who are careless about the devastation of the environment that is extremely significant to their lives. Here, “eco-phobia occurs when these individuals do not attend to keeping their environment safe and pure. For this reason, eco-phobia emerges when the characters cause tragic treatment to the environmental nature. As a result, eco-phobia, which is the incarnation of the characters’ fearful feelings, is reinforced by their sense of “ennui”; which means that they are bored and mentally tired because they no longer have interesting or exciting dependence on nature; (Guignard & Murphy, 2020) write: “when individuals develop this sense of ennui, being confronted with stressful information or situations only fosters this sense of ennui” (p.157). Here, (Guignard & Murphy, 2020) focus on ennui as the core of eco-phobia because the fictional characters are disappointed with their negligence of their environmental nature. However, they lately become obsessed with its vitality.

In Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*, the sense of ennui come from Pilar’s comment on Toby’s fear. Toby becomes very frightened by the loss of some environmental elements, like the bees and other important insects. Formerly, Adam assured her that she will be a great women, just like Eve in heaven. Yet, she gets more frightened when Pilar expresses his anxiety concerning the poor position of the bees which he is responsible for. He says that he is no longer interested and excited to maintain his job in charge of keeping the environment of the bees. His negative remarks on the deteriorating nature makes Toby depressed. She is afraid of losing their nature; and she – together with Pilar and Adam – suffer from grief or fear: “Pilar said, their feelings would be hurt and they’d swarm and go elsewhere. Or they’d die.

The bees on her face hesitated: maybe they could feel her trembling. But they could tell grief from fear, because they didn’t sting. After a moment they lifted up and flew away, blending with the circling multitudes above the hives” (p.34). This experience indicates Toby’s notice of the bees that do not sting or do their active routine. She wonders how the bees do not exert their activity as usual. Consequently, she thinks that the bees, and other insect, will not be productive as ever. As a result, they will lose their importance to her life. Toby’s fearful anxiety, therefore, the culmination of her ennui as she notices that tangible deterioration in front of her eyes. In this respect, she exemplifies the true senses of ennui created by Atwood’s narrative descriptions of the characters’ anxious feeling of eco-phobia.

Anxiety and eco-phobia are inextricable. (op de Beeck, 2020) maintains that eco-phobia originates from the characters’ anxious feelings regarding their environmental lodging. (op de Beeck, 2020) refers to the critics and academicians who are interested in eco-phobia. These critics
and academicians are concerned with the natural unpredictability that makes the fictional characters live in turbulent and unstable life conditions: “ecocritics and environmental educators use the term ‘ecophobia’ to refer to the fear and anxiety associated with environmental unpredictability” (p.257). In this case, (op de Beeck, 2020) argues that literary works depict such environmental unpredictability because they deal with serious natural matters including the apocalyptic event which will be discussed in the next section. Consequently, eco-phobia is the lurking impetus of natural apocalypse which is created as an accumulation of human negative practices against nature and its supreme position as an integral component in the characters’ lives. These characters are depicted by the authorial utilization of descriptive narrative point of view that conveys to the reader a precise panoramic view of the characters’ eco-phobia. In this case, the fictional narrative modes are necessary for deducing the authorial portrayal of eco-phobia and its gradual creation of apocalyptic events when the environmental nature is neglected and mistreated by its residents.

Atwood’s The Year of the Flood approached these eco-phobic feelings through the omniscient narrative point of view. The plot abounds with complex and various narrative descriptions of the environmental nature. The narrators tell us about the character’s torn feelings due to the natural problems around them. The characters, who are blessed with Gods’ positive providence, will soon be deprived of his mercy. This is because the characters do not recognize God greatness, and; consequently, their mistreatment of nature equals their faith. To put it another way, when the characters mistreat their environmental nature, they indirectly lose their faith because they implicitly disobeyed God’s order through neglecting nature. Atwood portrays this divine situation by the narrator that keeps describing the miserable case of the repentant characters that do not recognize and understand the greatness of God in nature. In the long run, the characters believe that the waterless flood is motivates their anxiety and fear. They are wait for their desiring by this flood that is taking over their whole life; and it might annihilate their existence; the narrator describes this even as follows:

That is the point: not seen. We cannot know God by reason and measurement; indeed, excess reason and measurement lead to doubt. Through them, we know that Comets and nuclear holocausts are among the possible tomorrows, not to mention the Waterless Flood, that we fear looms ever nearer. This fear dilutes our certainty, and through that channel comes loss of Faith; and then the temptation to enact malevolence enters our Souls; for if annihilation awaits us, why bother to strive for the Good? (p.40)

In this catastrophic event, the characters seem to be controlled by the environmental nature which was previously created perfectly by God. However, when it is severely mistreated by its characters, it avenges itself on them. It destroys their life and puts them in environmental impasses. In a striking way, Atwood puts forth a comprehensive picture of how eco-phobia lies at the core of environmental apocalypse, which is the most dangerous event in the nature. That is, apocalypse is genuinely threatens the characters’ lives and residence in nature since it is destructive. Here, the characters must follow cautionary steps regarding their environmental in order to save it. The waterless flood depicted in the novel is all about the apocalyptic catastrophic events that endanger the characters’ lives and stability. The next section will discuss such apocalyptic events in the novel.

Apocalypse

The concept of apocalypse, therefore, is always associated with the end of the worlds and it depiction literary works. Authors try their hands to project a realistic view of the deteriorating environmental world in their narratives. (Sinykin, 2020) approaches this concept in literature. He claims that authors are the real users of the concept of apocalypse but fictional in their demeanors. The concept of apocalypse, according to (Sinykin, 2020), refers to the authors’ incorporation of the environmental world in their writings and how nature is affected by it. Authors, furthermore, depict apocalypse in their narrative scenes in order to offer a vivid picture of the characters hopelessness i.e., the characters are hopeless when they confront apocalyptic incidents in their lives. Apocalypse, on the other hand, is the destructive event that make the characters pessimistic and hopeless concerning the continuation life; (Sinykin, 2020) writes: “apocalypse has recurrent as a tempting form through which to express a sense of hopelessness” (p.1). In this case, apocalypse raise the fictional characters’ consideration of the presence of
The narrative incidents, therefore, are the genuine textual clues about apocalypse and its pertinent influence on the future of the characters’ environment. As such, narrative texts offer redeemable solutions to the environmental problems. Authors utilize their narrative descriptions to deal with these environmental matters via the fictional portrayal of reality. By the same token, the concept of apocalypse is appropriated by authors in their narrative works because “it offers a way of out of an otherwise irredeemably unjust world. Adherence to it obscures that it is a story, rather than a description of reality” (Sinykin, 2020). In this sense, the literary text is realistic to a great extent as it perceives the apocalyptic incidents in the course of the plot and how it could be resolved through putting forth the basic tenets of avoiding it by all means. Most importantly, the concept of apocalypse includes natural mass destructive scenes that appear on the narrative level of literary works. These scenes might be floods, earthquakes, volcanoes and so forth. Hence, their appearance in the narrative scenes as an illumination of the authorial expression of their inevitable danger to the lives of the characters.

Atwood, similarly, deals with such environmental apocalypse in the course of The Year of the Flood. The novel teems with exemplary scenes and event that relate to the nexus of apocalypse. The most important event is the waterless flood occurs in the plot. The eponymous flood is the essential apocalyptic scenes incorporated in the narrative event sequences. Atwood’s narrator meticulously tells the story of the waterless flood that endangers the characters’ lives in the novel. Consequently, Atwood, as an apocalyptic author, uses apocalypse as a means of expression. That is, she conveys the characters’ sense of hopelessness in the novels by portraying the effect of the flood on their living conditions. This is because they are severely threatened by the flood; and they may lose their lodging and other properties. Atwood’s narrative expertise, therefore, is appropriated by the characters’ ordeals at times of apocalyptic incidents caused by the waterless flood. Toby strongly believes in the waterless flood after she witnesses the deterioration of nature around her. She becomes very cautious as she feels the imminent advent of the flood. Toby begins preparing a shelter to protect herself from demise. In doing so, she could guarantee her survival. However, she did not use to believe in this flood. Yet, the Gardeners warned her against its occurrence, which makes her believe in it. As a result, she starts precautionary preparations for it: “After a cautious pause, she began stashing away a few supplies — building her own private Ararat. She wasn’t sure she believed in the Waterless Flood — as time passed, the Gardeners and their theories seemed more and more remote, more fanciful, more creative — in a word, loonier — but she believed in it enough to take the rudimentary precautions. She was in charge of Spa inventory, so stockpiling was easy” (p.49). Toby’s building of Ararat as private lodging is an indication of her true feelings of the inevitable occurrence of the flood that would destroy her life. Her invention of the Spa and building other sheltering lodging is an indicative narrative token about her belief in the flood and its abrupt occurrence. Being so, Atwood excels in portraying Toby as an archetypal paradigm of the characters who are influenced by the massive destruction of nature by apocalyptic incidents.

Toby’s apocalyptic experience is, therefore, gloomy and depressive. In a similar way, the critical insights of the apocalypse are gloomy or as (O’Connell, 2021) puts it simply: “apocalypse is profoundly dull” (p.5). The gloomy attributes of apocalypse correspond to the characters’ feeling of the possible destruction that will be left by apocalyptic incidents. Apocalypse is “dull” and depressive because it makes the characters’ lives melancholic; and they become despondent to the extent that they might be obliterated. They do not anything regarding their future as it is confined to the apocalyptic events that destroy their living. Therefore, they become melancholic. By this way, literary authors try to establish fictional conventions that make them deal with apocalyptic incidents as if they are real and could occur; and, as (O’Connell, 2021)argues, apocalypse “adhered to certain established narrative convention” “to cause annihilation of an unprecedented swiftness and scale” (p.6). Moreover, apocalypses is a kind of experience. To clarify, the receptive readers might feel themselves as the fictional characters who undergo the apocalyptic experience. The characters’ plights are projected onto the readers’ imaginative conceptualization of the apocalyptic events. As a result, readers are neither the protagonist nor the antagonists. Instead, there are real people who could imagine themselves as the charters who live apocalyptic dilemmas; (O’Connell, 2021)comments: “and the important point in this context is that we ourselves were not among the protagonists and antagonists” (p.6). The narrative descriptions of apocalypse, therefore, make the reading audience like bystanders that watch the occurrence of apocalypse in the characters’ lives. As such, apocalypse illustrates the critical position of the characters in literary works. It describes their ordeals and their arbitrary response to
its destruction. For this reason, authors attempt to depict this experience in order to depict the genuine apocalyptic incidents that occur in nature and prevent some nations from good living conditions.

Atwood, in *The Year of the Flood*, exemplifies this authorial notion. She portrays the arbitrary occurrence of apocalyptic incidents. The narrator tells us about the “dull” apocalypse that will appear after the waterless flood. The imagined environmental scenes after the occurrence of the waterless flood are moving and horrible. The narrator says that the even history will be annihilated and destroyed. After the flood, everything will be destroyed; and the flood will not leave any trail indicating the elements of civilization when it really occurs. It will obliterate all the physical world leaving nothing excepted for living creatures, like creeping plants and birds that will perch on the rubble of human civilization: “take comfort in the thought that this history will soon be swept away by the Waterless Flood. Nothing will remain of the External World but decaying wood and rusting metal implements; and over these the Kudzu and other vines will climb; and Birds and Animals will nest in them, as we are told in the Human Words of God” (p.58). This horrible apocalyptic scene embodies Atwood’s interest in the contemporary environmental crises. It is the exact scenario of future apocalypse if apocalyptic incidents that could take place in case humanity neglects and mistreats a nature. The narrator recounts an apocalyptic event that could end human history forever. This notion relates to the eco-critical conceptualization of apocalypse and how it might occur in the future. As a narrative work, Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* is concerned with apocalypse in this way. The narrative descriptions of apocalypse are genuine instances of the possible end of the world and history at the same time. The detailed narrative elaboration of the waterless flood is a blatant indication of apocalypse in the course of the novel. It wearies the characters’ thoughts and comfort. However, it this apocalypse could be mitigated and avoided by the pastoral wilderness landscapes to which the characters resort in order to save the environment from destruction; and they could live safely.

**Pastoral**

The concept of pastoral encompasses the perfect scenic sublimes, like landscapes, wilderness, forests, lakes, mounts, cliffs … etc. They are the natural elements that constitute the minimum characteristics of the ideal environment for good life. To sustain his claims on perfect environment, (Guignard & Murphy, 2020) maintains that the concept of pastoral connotes the typical environmental scenery that is very significant for human living. (Guignard & Murphy, 2020) says that literary authors depict such scenery in a way that attracts the readers’ attention towards that kind of environmental nature preferred by people. In this way, the environmental scene should be unspoiled and ideal; otherwise, the environmental scene would not be superbly idyllic, especially the rural places like the countryside. By deducing (Guignard & Murphy, 2020)argument, fictional pastoral is a “literary tradition” that reflects the perfect countryside scenery: “literary tradition, involving a retreat from the city to the countryside” (p.33). Furthermore, the perfect pastoral literary scenery reveals the ideal rural life styles “in which ‘pastoral’ implies an idealization of rural life” (p.33). In doing so, (Guignard & Murphy, 2020)accentuates the idyllic peculiarities of the environmental scene to reveal literary authors’ depiction of the pastoral environment. Hence, these pastoral scenes must be sustained and deduced properly by reader to understand the function of pastoral settings in literary works.

Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*, apparently, exemplifies such pastoral scenes to a great extent. There are a lot of natural description of environmental components, like tree, plant, animals and so forth. These components are extremely exemplary for inferring the function of pastoral scenes in the novel. My interpretation of the narrator relies on the ideal environmental scene’s sublimes, like trees, plants and animals that are created by God in a perfect way. The narrator unravels the bliss of God in offering mankind a perfect nature; and should be dedicated to sustain order on earth in order to preserve this ideal environmental scenery. The narrator’s reference to the creation moment incarnates Atwood’s serious interest in the environmental and how it should be protected from any type of natural deterioration. In the following quotation, the narrator recounts the divine creation of the environmental scenery together with its components while he stands in a solitary landscape:

We are told that, on the fifth day of God’s Creating activities, the waters brought forth Creatures, and on the sixth day the dry land was populated with Animals, and with Plants and Trees; and all
were blessed, and told to multiply; and finally, Adam— that is to say, Mankind— was created. According to Science, this is the same order in which the species did in fact appear on the Planet. Man last of all. Or more or less the same order. Or close enough. (p.1)

At this narrative point, Atwood— as a literary author— offers the reader with the key vital components of the natural environment. She follows a meticulous portrayal of these components by dint of the narrator’s perception of nature as a place created by God for the ultimate benefit of humanity. Accordingly, these components are a precise manifestation of pastoral within the broad context of the novel. At the beginning of Atwood’s, The Year of the Flood, the narrator mentions the divine creation of the Earth because people should understand the function nature to them. Therefore, he bitterly talks about the destruction of animals and birds at the hands of people. On the grounds of this fact, people have to restore the destroyed environmental components in order to have impeccable environmental milieus: “How much have we lost, dear Fellow Mammals and Fellow Mortals! How much have we willfully destroyed! How much do we need to restore, within ourselves!” (p.1). In this light of this narrative perspective, Atwood delivers to reader the significance of the exuberance of environmental components to elevate the readers’ awareness of the importance of the surrounding environment for their lives. On the grounds of these environmental components, the pastoral elements represented in the novel deliberately elucidate Atwood’s concern with the contemporary state of the ecological issues. Moreover, they indicate her true adherence to the attainable ways to prevent any harmful action that might destroy these elements. They also represent the idyllic scenic sublimes necessary for keeping the most complete form of environmental nature.

The concept of pastoral is a kind of literary tradition employed by authors to produce an aesthetic effect of fictional texts. (Griffiths, 2020) contends that pastoral is a textual appropriation of ideal pastoral scenes in literary works. The narrative peculiarities of the text are aesthetic and they convey the authorial deliberate depiction of pastoral scenes outside the text. Authors depend on the narrative aspects of their texts in order to produce an aesthetic effect regarding the pastoral scenes depicted in their fictional landscapes. In this case, the imagined fictional landscapes “engage implicitly in aesthetic dialogue with the theory and practice of pastoral” (p.29). The importance of this pastoral engagement lies in the core of the relationship between human beings and the environment. However, pastoral is the perfect natural setting for human beings to escape the negative influence of urban life. As such, it includes ideal views of nature, or as (Griffiths, 2020) describes it, pastoral is the “idyllic” environmental places that are viable for humanity’s symbiosis within natural landscapes; (Griffiths, 2020) writes: “the relationship between human beings and their idyllic environment is thus conceived as an immediate and deeply symbiotic one” (pp.47-48). Human symbiosis within the demarcations of environmental landscapes entails perfect images of nature portrayed in literary works. It is very significant for the continual safe living of people together with other natural components in the environment. As I previously argued, pastoral scenes include scenic sublimes, like such as trees, forests, gardens, solitary landscapes, wilderness and the like. As such, these scenic sublimes are sorely necessary for the ideal environment.

Atwood’s The Year of the Flood involves many scenic sublimes that represent ideal images of perfect environment. One of these sublimes is solitary landscapes. Toby and her father live in isolated life. They do not like living in urban and crowded places. Instead, they live in quasi-countryside far from the madding crowd. At the novel’s exposition, the spatial setting is told by the narrator. The whole place is a secluded landscape far from people or urban civilization. This is because the place is preferred by Toby and her father. The omniscient narrative point of view describes their solitary living as follows: “They’d been living in the semi-country, before the sprawl had rolled over that stretch of landscape. Their white frame house had ten acres of trees around it, and there were squirrels, and the first green rabbits. No rakunks, those hadn’t been put together yet. There were a lot of deer; they’d get into her mother’s vegetable garden” (p.6). This solitary landscape in solitary landscapes is idyllic; and it embodies the precise sense of ideal pastoral. Consequently, Atwood offers narrative alternatives for any apocalyptic occurrences. In other words, she advocates the idyllic and perfect pastoral life instead of exploiting the environmental nature for unnecessary purposes that will inevitably destruct nature. The significance of such solitary landscape is, therefore, the replacement of deteriorating nature with perfect and safe scenic sublimes. Toby and her father pastoral life is perfect, or as (Griffiths, 2020) argues, they are “idyll-dwellers” who “are attentive to even its smallest perfections” (p.48).

The idyllic image of nature relates to the concept of pastoral as depicted in the novel. In Culture, Environment and Ecopolitics, (Heffernan & Wragg, 2020) discuss the perfect images of the
environmental nature through the concept of pastoral. They contends that literary works portray the environment by means of purposeful narrative discourse and picturesque images that exemplify the ideal sense of the natural environment. These images attract the attention of the fictional characters and make them love living close the green environment; (Heffernan & Wragg, 2020) comment: “images and discourses of the natural are shot through with social ideals and desires for an/other relationship with the green world. These cultural representations of the natural have become more important to understanding green utopianism as our relationships to environmental crisis have changed” (p.57). Consequently, the images of nature are supremely beautiful and attractive since they convey the author’s narrative depiction of nature: “visions of nature as beautiful, valuable and, above all, pure and separate from the social proliferate in popular culture” (p.57). In this first place, according to (Heffernan & Wragg, 2020), these images and visions of nature are classified together with pastoral as basic components of scenic sublimes. Nonetheless, authors prefer describing them in imaginary manners: “the imaginary landscapes – pastoral, bucolic, wild and sublime, catastrophic and vengeful but always beautiful” (p.57).

Hence, the perfect image of environmental pastorals is the beautiful landscape and scenery needed by the fictional characters to live away from the vengeful natural reactions, like apocalyptic events. The concept of pastoral has these idyllic attributes that make it a pertinent eco-critical concept to the issue of environmental perfection including remedial natural elements, like animals, birds, and waters. Pastoral perfection is projected in some spatial settings of Atwood’s The Year of the Flood. The setting is abundant with beautiful pastoral scenes preferred by the characters as idyllic living places. MaddAddam, for example, promises Zeb of a heavenly pastoral living in green landscapes. This means that the characters are profoundly interested in living among natural views in order to alleviate their disturbed feelings concerning the environmental intimidating problems. They seek peace and solace of mind in nature. Here, MaddAddam exemplifies this case when he tells Zeb that they will live in a perfect landscape like the life in the past: “Then a wide green landscape unfolded — trees in the distance, a lake in the foreground, a rhino and three lions drinking. A scene from the past” (p.51). Therefore, Atwood fictionalizes this pastoral setting by depicting the characters’ strong desire to live in an isolated landscape an image of the idyllic scenic sublime. She offers a clear picture of how perfect nature could be obtained by preserving its pastoral elements. At this point, I would claim that such authorial narrative appropriation of pastoral is the core of eco-awareness because the characters benign to recognize the importance of nature to their life; and they sincerely start keeping it from any imminent threat. The characters, as (Heffernan & Wragg, 2020) claim, develop serious “awareness of environmental issues” (p.33). In the long run, pastoral is the remedial step for preserving the environmental nature from any apocalyptic destruction through preserving the idyllic scenic sublimes.

**Conclusion**

This study tried to explore idyllic pastoral as a remedy of apocalyptic eco-phobia in Margaret Atwood’s The Year of the Flood. It also offered and new reading of fictional pastoral components as eco-critical elements, which are hardly studied in the selected novel. The rarity of studying literary apocalypse and pastoral in the selected novel would lead to a new eco-critical interpretation in the light of eco-phobia. Conducting an eco-critical study on Atwood’s concern with nature opens the door for a unanimous consensus on the potential of literary texts to depict eco-phobia outside the text; whereby they could provide literary solutions by dint of their narrative peculiarities projected in the course of the plot. Equally important, the scarcity of this research lies in its symbolical portrayal of eco-phobia which exemplifies a literary critique of apocalyptic view of environmental nature, and therefore, proposing remedial invigorating solutions to them. The study, furthermore, offered an original literary analysis of eco-phobia which might play an influential role in raising environmental importance via creating fictional characters that become aware of natural deterioration; and they respond to it once they become aware of the vitality of nature to their lives. Such significance would mitigate the apocalyptic danger lurking behind destroying the natural environment, which is blatantly depicted in the selected novel through the characters’ eco-phobic feelings per se. In this respect, academicians of literature could perceive the research’s contribution as a key factor of fictional pastoral scenic sublimes that pave the way
for new literary insights concerning the stereotype of an ideal environment. The study’s genuine contribution, moreover, relates to the accentuation of literary pastoral scenes portrayed in the plot of Atwood’s The Year of the Flood. That is, the novel is abundant with pastoral scenes that serve as primal description of perfect environment which must be protected by human beings instead of destroying it. Here, the environmental destruction might be mitigated by bringing into light the ideal pastoral scenes that promote the significance of nature to the lives of human beings. As such, the novel could elevate people’s consciousness concerning the nexus of the environment i.e., the ecological system as a whole that is obviously described in the novel.

References


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